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Farm Women in Crisis

One fact needs to be established at the outset: women *are* involved in the financial struggles, or accomplishments, of a farm along with the men. The same can be said of children. No matter how secretive a couple may be, children have antennas with feelings. Yes, I realize wives may be part of any business venture with their husbands, urban or rural, and usually the day's business transactions are not forgotten when the store is locked or the barn door shut.

Financial stress can be a stepping stone or a stumbling block. Repeatedly we've heard, "I'm a stronger person," or "Our marriage is stronger" as a result of the farm crisis. Such strength is frequently nurtured by supportive friends and family, within the church or outside of it.

On the other end of the spectrum, marriages have crumbled as finances tightened. And to be judgmental in such cases



can be a serious mistake. A lack of understanding friends and family or a closed door of communication can sometimes precipitate the failure.

The responses I received to my request to "tell your story" for this issue of *Women's Concerns Report* were

overwhelming. Each story is beautifully told. Each writer exhibits courage and a strong faith in a loving God. Each brings a different perspective. Some have already lost the farm and have put the experience behind them. Others are still struggling to save the farm. One writer likens her personal family struggle to the loss of a farm. The valleys through which they have passed are very real, different yet similar, and each one has emerged victorious.

Almost every contributor enclosed a personal note: "It was harder than I expected but once I got started it poured out. I couldn't quit." "Thanks. I learned a lot by writing my story. Now I feel more responsible." "I did it for you and to inform other women what has been happening to the heart of America." Others said, "We'll be thinking of you the day of your sale (our farm machinery sale was held last Nov. 18) and will be there with you spiritually."

We have learned to know and to love most of these writers. One person was unable to contribute: "It's just too painful. I know I should tell my story. Maybe in a few years." I have included the writers' addresses should readers feel moved to contact any of them.

I received a few more stories than could be used in this issue. Rather than drastically edit all the stories, I have chosen instead to print several of them in forthcoming issues of the *Inter-Mennonite Farm Newsletter*, which I edit as a part of our MCC assignment. If you are not already a subscriber and would like to read additional stories and commentaries on the farm situation, send your name and address to the MCC Akron office. Your name will be put on the mailing list.

Now read, think, pray a bit and enjoy. —Winifred Ewy

Winifred Ewy and her husband, Lester, have been living on the same Reno County, Kan. farm all 44 years of their married life. The farm they have now lost was originally homesteaded by Lester's parents in 1901. Although they, too, felt guilt, failure, anger and utter defeat, they believe it has been a growing experience. They have been serving as farm issues coordinators for MCC U.S. for the past two years. Active members of First Mennonite Church in Hutchinson, Kan., the Ewys have three grown daughters. Winifred graduated from Bethel College in home economics, and taught for 10 years. They can be reached at Route 1, Box 115, Partridge, KS 67566; phone (316) 538-2396.

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See insert for details

"The deepest wounds are caused by broken relationships, broken through mistrust, judgmental attitudes, unkindness, thoughtlessness, words which are better left unsaid."

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by Nancy Kinsinger Halder

Shattered Relationships

I tried to write my own story. I tried to write other people's stories. But I found it extremely difficult to articulate anything sensible or interesting. I felt like quitting!

Why is it so difficult for me to relate the story of my involvement in the farm crisis, especially now that our particular crisis is over—apart from continuing to pay for the privilege of a six-year attempt to farm! In the midst of it, I seemed to have no problem writing or speaking.

Perhaps I need more time. Perhaps in five years I could write more easily. Perhaps I am attempting to bury those years because I get weary just thinking about how complicated it all was. Perhaps I just want to get on with my life—to look forward to today and tomorrow, something that was so hard to do for several reasons.

For whatever reason, I chose not to narrate my story, but to relate two impressions which vividly remain with me not only from the loss of our own farm operation, but also from counseling others affected by the farm crisis.

The saddest aspect of the changed farming climate in the 1980s is, I believe, not the loss of land—although I do not wish to minimize that trauma—but the loss of relationships. The deepest wounds are caused by broken relationships, broken through mistrust, judgmental attitudes, unkindness, thoughtlessness, words better left unsaid. Losing all one has worked very hard to achieve is secondary to losing close friends and family. Those who survive with fewer scars are those who are blessed with people who remain loyal to the inner person, not the outer person.

Most basic of these relationships is that of wife and husband. Statistics portray an increased divorce rate for farm families in crisis. I observed that in the majority of marital conflicts, a fundamental problem was lack of

communication. Furthermore, wives tended to come to terms more quickly with the farm problems than did their husbands. They felt frustrated by their husbands' denial of the problems, unwillingness to discuss the situation or to seek counseling—whether emotional or financial counseling.

This situation prompted women to confide: "I don't like what is happening in my family." "My husband and I have always had an open, honest relationship but now we're like polite strangers." "Why can't he talk about what we



both see happening to us?" "I am so tired of being the strong part of this relationship."

One can theorize about why many women are able to accept the reality of their situations more quickly than are their husbands, but I do not intend to do so here. Rather, I would like to look at what can be done when differing viewpoints threaten to irretrievably break a relationship. What can be done to intervene to prevent yet another divorce statistic?

"A new mind set must be developed in which change is seen as opportunity, rather than unmitigated loss. This is not always easy, as most farmers have anticipated farming for the rest of their lives."



"I would not have chosen to be a statistic of the 1980s farm crisis. But in retrospect I have no regrets. The years of uncertainty and lack of financial stability enabled me to learn what is really important in life, and has increased my faith in God and in people."

One woman, concerned about her husband's lack of emotional stability but not about her own, agreed to enter counseling after her husband refused to. Convinced that she was doing this simply to find out how to respond to and best help her spouse, she in fact discovered her own unacknowledged anger and hostility toward her husband. She began to focus on herself, rather than on her husband. Eventually he saw positive changes in his wife and even agreed to attend sessions with her.

For many years another woman felt that to talk to anyone about their farm problems and her husband's inability to deal with them would be disloyal and a betrayal of her husband. She also believed her husband possessed a spiritual mandate to head the household and make the decisions. She felt inhibited to take any initiative or action for fear of being disobedient.

She finally arrived at a new understanding and realized she had to act. She began by confiding in close friends and family, asking for their concerted prayers. She also made inquiries to find out what, if any, options remained for them.

After several weeks, it seemed that a miracle occurred—her husband began to talk to her about decisions which soon needed to be made. She also enrolled in a short peer-counseling course offered by a local farmers organization, learning ways to encourage conversation and gaining insight into her husband's behavior. All was not smooth sailing forever after, but together they worked out a solution to their farm crisis.

To summarize these two situations in a few words does not adequately express the months and years of frustration and agony which preceded the healing of relationships.

A second lasting impression concerns the role of change, or how one views change, as a determining factor in the ability to survive an altered life plan. As I recall the stability of my own childhood—living in the same house, going to church with the same children in my Sunday school class, walking to a one-room country school, having a farmer-father who was just a loud shout away, no movement of families in or out of the neighborhood—I am reminded how different it is for my own children.

Although they remain living in the same house—even that was for several years an uncertainty—their Sunday school classes both lose and gain children. School is a 12-mile, hour-long bus ride. Their daddy works at an office 38 miles

from home. Of the five houses adjacent to ours, four currently have different occupants than they did a year ago. Included among those who moved are a beloved aunt and uncle who moved out of state due to the farm crisis. My children's sense of stability must come from family relationships and God, since the outward trappings are ever-changing.

Many farm people experienced a background similar to mine. The tendency can be to view change and instability as threatening and bad because "it is not like it used to be." A new mindset must be developed in which change is seen as opportunity, rather than unmitigated loss.

This is not always easy, as most farmers have anticipated farming for the rest of their lives. When circumstances radically alter that expectation, change is seen as an enemy. Those who can graciously and creatively move with the ebb and flow of circumstances more easily adjust than those who cling to how it was to have been.

I would have not chosen to be a statistic of the 1980's farm crisis. But in retrospect I have no regrets. The years of uncertainty and lack of financial stability enabled me to learn what is really important in life, and has increased my faith in God and in people. Even though my husband and I experienced some of the worst times in our relationship, we also grew closer together. The farm crisis strengthened our marriage. Opportunities for writing, speaking and developing relationships with others also opened up.

I close this article with words from my son who, with a child's wisdom, can see into the heart of an issue—in this case, our relationship to the land. As a 4-year-old, Simon asked me about the ownership of a certain field. I explained that one person owned it and another rented it, trying to define the concept of renting in 4-year-olds' terms.

"Oh, I get it," he said. "It's like God gives us the earth and we rent it from him." ■

Nancy and John Halder and their three children live in her childhood home at Route 1, Parnell, IA 52325. From 1973 to 1979, Nancy was employed by the Mennonite Board of Missions in London, England, where she met John. Following the loss of the family farm, the couple operated the MCC farm crisis hotline from 1985 to 1987. Nancy is a 1973 graduate of Goshen (Ind.) College.



"I no longer have the mental image of my husband and I, in old age with snowy hair and walking canes, out in the pasture near the house and our livestock coming over to visit with us."

by Marlene K. Lemmer Beeson

Letting Go the Dream

I am a second-year full-time student at Bethel College in Newton, Kan. I am also a 40-year-old farmer with a husband and two children.

My life changed drastically a year ago last summer. My husband and I were farmers in western Kansas. We lost everything and went through bankruptcy. Because of our loss, we redefined ourselves as losers. We lost our sense of self-worth because we had valued ourselves in terms of what we did for a living. Our bankruptcy led us to view ourselves as failures.

How can I talk about this when I know that it will be printed for anyone to see? It's not easy to lay one's feelings out in print. However, I hope that in the telling someone else may be comforted and that I may be able to think about it, read about it and then to eventually move on. Someone once told me that it takes about two years for an individual to accept and get over the death of something that was important to them. If that is true, then I think I am about on schedule.

The demise of our farming operation was the result of a series of bad decisions on our part and the declining prices and low profit margins on the grain crops and livestock that we produced. In addition, our deteriorating relationship with my husband's parents, with whom we farmed, played a key role in our decision to take bankruptcy and leave the farm.

I still have very strong "red," "orange" and sometimes "blue" feelings when I think about our lost dreams and goals involving the farm. I no longer imagine my husband and I, in old age with snowy hair and walking canes, out in the pasture near the house and our livestock coming over to visit with us. Maybe some day it won't hurt so much to let that dream go. I'm sure, however, that I will always think in terms of farming seasons—planting, cultivating, watering, harvesting—and breeding, calving, branding and weaning.

For Further Study

Books

Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America...Culture and Agriculture*. San Francisco: Avon. 1978. Explains how agribusiness and farm mechanization are affecting the American fabric.

Bhagat, Shantilal. *The Family Farm, Can it Be Saved?* Elgin, Ill.: Brethren Press. 1985.

Applies biblical and ethical insights to the current American farm crisis and suggests policy changes.

Freudenberger, C. Dean. *Food for Tomorrow?* Minneapolis: Augsburg Press. 1984. 176 pages. \$8.95, paperback. An experienced agronomist, minister and anthropologist provides one of the best summaries available on the worldwide food, agricultural and ecological crisis.

As a student I have found myself going through some of the same steps the young go through on their way to mental and emotional maturity. I'm seeking answers to some of the same questions they are. I've questioned some of my religious views, especially those having to do with what is expected out of human beings and God's plan for the nature of our human interactions.

We were deeply hurt and disillusioned by some of our neighbors' and family's actions the last few months on the farm. Some of the values that we learned from our parents and peers while growing up seemed to have been thrown away by the same people who had taught them to us. It has helped me to learn that this is a common phenomenon in societies undergoing rapid change which threatens their survival.

One of the specific changes I observed had to do with neighbors and family not helping others without charging for it. Everything had a price tag! Two years ago, a couple of months after I had major surgery, my husband and son ran 110 head of sick steers through the chutes by themselves because we couldn't afford to hire anyone to help. Not one of the neighbors offered assistance, not even family members living a mile across the pasture from us.

After my husband and I decided we could no longer live in such an atmosphere, we called the farm crisis line and were directed to Bethel College in Newton. With the help of a lot of truly wonderful people at Bethel, we now have a whole new set of goals. Bethel College's tuition program for displaced farmers gave us the chance we needed to start over. Many good things have been said about the tuition program. But the most important thing we have received from the college has been emotional support. I am grateful for both the tuition and the support. In addition, I have gained a new perspective on what it means to be Christian.

I was raised Catholic and still identify myself with that denomination. However, sometimes I feel like a Mennonite. Anabaptist philosophy makes a lot of sense to me. Can there be any other way than pacifism? I think not! Jesus quite specifically tells us to love our neighbor and one does not do violence to someone one loves.

I have come to believe that our personal salvation is tied to and is dependent upon our interaction with others. I believe we are now seeing the beginning of a reformation of the Catholic church—or a split between the traditionalists and those Catholics who no longer feel the church is meeting their needs.

Jackson, Wes, Wendell Berry and Bruce Coleman, eds. *Meeting the Expectations of the Land: Essays in Sustainable Agriculture and Stewardship*. San Francisco: North Point Press. 1984. 250 pages. \$12.50. Seventeen essays describing new models of sustainable agriculture.

Platte, LaVonne Godwin, ed. *Hope for the Family Farm*. Newton, Kan.: Faith and Life Press. 1987. \$7.95. Thirteen

essays on stewardship, community, sustainability, theology, public policy and family as they relate to the farm crisis.

Video

From this Valley...On Defending the Family Farm. Produced by Office of Interpretation, General Assembly Mission Board, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). 1986. 20-minute video outlining history of family farming in the

United States and explaining church's decision to defend it.

Farm Journal Articles

Braun, Dick. "Your Kids May be Calling for Help." January 1987. Pages 30-31.

Braun, Dick. "Support Groups Rekindle a Flickering Flame." December 1986. Pages 40-41.

Guebert, Alan. "His Brother's Keeper: Retired Farmer

Mediates Other Farmers' Problems." January 1987. Page B-2.

"How to Start a Group that Really Cares." January 1987. Pages 24-25.

Moser, S. "Mother to Son... Timmy, Your Father is Not a Failure." September 1986. Page 24-B.

Had I not experienced the pain of leaving the farm I wonder if I would have explored these ideas. I would therefore like to convey the following message to those in similar situations: Change is inevitable and often frightening, but many good things can emerge from adversity.



You may lose your farm but that does not mean your value as a human being is diminished. If you value yourself as a person, rather than because of what you do for a living, it is easier to find the courage to seek out a new vocation and to go on with your life. ■

Marlene Beeson and her husband, Bob, are both students at Bethel College in Newton, Kan., having enrolled through the free-tuition plan Bethel offers to displaced farmers. One of their two children is also attending Bethel. Marlene is of the Catholic faith but says, "Sometimes I feel like a Mennonite." The Beesons' address is 720 West 12th St., Apt. 308, Newton, KS 67114.

by Eileen Pembroke Martisko Pankratz

Illusion of Control

It is said that when you marry a farmer you marry the farm. In December 1982, I married the farmer—Stan—his fourth-generation farm and two farming corporations. One of the corporations was made up of Stan and two non-family members who operated the farm and the second consisted of the land's owners, Stan's parents, Stan, and three non-farming siblings and their spouses.

I also married into the farm/rural crisis, but at that point was innocent of that fact. I was told that our economic problems were part of the normal up-and-down cycles of cattle feeding and grain production.

For both Stan and I this was our second marriage, both having survived divorce. Our divorces had taught us about loss and change. Our past emotional pain increased our understanding and compassion for others required to make life transitions.

As I went through my personal valley of loss I was sustained by my faith in an eternal God who gives the promise in Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

I had not chosen the path of divorce, but I did choose the path that brought me, and my children, to Mountain Lake and a joyful union of love and mutuality with Stan.

It soon became evident that God, or circumstances, were not going to allow me to return to the comfortable, complacent middle-class Christian life that I had known before. Inwardly I felt I had done enough growing.

As farm people we met up against what Anne Wilson Schaef calls "the illusion of control" in her new book, *When Society Becomes An Addict*. "The common belief is that responsible people are 'in charge' and should be able to control everything," she states. "It therefore follows that they should be held accountable and blamed if something does not go as planned."

As we realized we couldn't succeed no matter how hard we worked—the Puritan/Mennonite work ethic—or how

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well we managed, we became disillusioned with the American dream. Squeezed between rising input costs controlled by agribusiness and declining commodity prices determined in the "free market," we felt victimized.

In fact, we had no control at all! By January 1985 it became apparent to the national news media that the entire agricultural sector was financially in trouble. We felt hopelessness as the crisis spread from isolated farm families to America's rural communities. And then we felt abandoned when the Reagan administration ignored or denied the crisis.

I have been working through this crisis on at least three levels over the past five years. Although I describe them separately, the experiences and awareness happened simultaneously, nearly overwhelming me.

On the spiritual level, I asked, "What does God want us to learn?" I knew how to face a personal crisis with a personal relationship with God, but I didn't have the "faith" answers for when an entire group of people faces a dilemma. I was convinced, though, that God wanted to mold us and transform us through this experience.

On the intellectual level, I researched the causes of the farm crisis. This was partly because I felt a need to know the facts when I felt blame directed at us. I learned about micro- and macroeconomics, imports and exports, the federal reserve system and the federal government's fiscal policy. I have become more politically aware.

On the personal level, we have felt fear, dread and anxiety as we wondered, "What would we do? Where would we go if we had to leave the farm?" My heart ached with the thought of my children having to make another move.

As our fears came to pass we had to accept a sheriff's sale on some of the land. Then, unexpectedly last November, we were served a foreclosure notice on the rest of the land two days before Thanksgiving. We were shocked and confused. We thought we had been negotiating in good faith. Again we experienced that gut-wrenching feeling of the unknown that left us so devastated we could barely function. That was our lowest point. On Thanksgiving Day we struggled to be thankful for the blessings we did have.

After five additional months of waiting and negotiating, our situation was resolved. All the land was deeded back, the debts forgiven. This brought relief, but at a price. We had been powerless to stop the inevitable—the family lost ownership of the land. We know this experience of loss

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has been repeated in countless other families across the Midwest. We feel fortunate that communication and caring still exists in our family.

The restructuring included the opportunity to buy back part of the land. Since we have no assets, our only risk is losing more years of our lives. We are "starting over" but we know from experience that a new beginning is never a totally fresh start. We bring with us wounds and memories—and debts—that encumber the path.

What have we learned? We have learned to ask questions and to take time to reflect upon the direction our country is taking. We are asking many questions: Does America value family farms and small towns? Who will own the land? Who will control food production? Would farmers benefit from production controls? Are present agricultural methods sustainable? What is happening to the soil and water? Does our church have a theology of the land, when 18 to 20 percent of us are farmers? What is the relationship between competition and a sense of community? Can we reduce our vulnerability through diversification? Will Rural Economic Development only provide more minimum salary jobs for women? And the overarching question, as with every policy issue—WHO STANDS TO GAIN?

We have found a remnant of people asking these same questions. In the fall 1986 issue of *The Land Report*, Rob Peterson stated: "To just be a decent person—a good neighbor, hard worker, leading a comfortable life — may not be enough. If one is static, not growing or challenging oneself to improve, one may be living trivially, which is a form of evil!" That some people are acting has given us hope for the future of rural life.

This phase of our journey, encompassing more than six years, has been complicated and complex. My definition of "responsible" has become "the ability to respond." (Credit Schaeff.) My heart and knowledge have expanded. I feel connected with the peasant mother in Central America as she hopes for her children's future. I continue to remember God's promise about a future for me, but I realize I must work toward goals that will bring a life-giving future for all. I don't know where that path will lead.

Eileen Pankratz was raised in western New York state but has lived for 20 years in Minnesota, where she and her husband, Stan, farm. A home economics major, she has taught in the hills of Appalachia and in inner-city schools in Omaha and Fulda, Minn. Presently she is a masters degree candidate in counseling. The couple has two teen-age children and reside at Route 1, Box 24, Mountain Lake, MN 56159.■

The scope of the problem facing (farm communities) can be imagined when we learn that over 4 million farms have vanished over the past half-century and America is still losing 30,000 a year."
—Statement of Concern, Kansas MCC Farm Crisis Committee

"The pain and travail evident in the crisis in rural America are mirror images of the larger picture of our country and our world. We are in a time of transition when the 'familiar' is disintegrating and what worked before is irrelevant or does not work any more. It is not clear what systems and new rules will emerge out of the chaos and

confusion but we are all caught in the agonies of a most difficult and trying time."
—Shantilal P. Bhagat, *The Family Farm, Can It Be Saved?*

by Edie Tschetter

Certainty Amid the Uncertain

"Farm Crisis in Iowa." "Many Farmers Facing Serious Financial Problems." We heard these words often in the news and read them in our Mennonite papers in the early '80s. The problem seemed far away from us though Iowa was a neighboring state and we, too, were farmers. It was difficult to relate to this news. I hate to admit it but I even entertained such thoughts as: "They just overspent" or "They were poor managers."

Life on a South Dakota farm has never been luxurious but we've always been comfortable. We felt we were not big spenders—almost always bought used furniture, used cars, used machinery and used clothing through an MCC thrift shop.

In 1983 we returned to our farm after an MCC term of service in Bolivia. Previous to that we had farmed for seven years and had purchased the family farm. The first year we were home, adverse weather conditions set in. We had extremely much rain, unusual for South Dakota. The second year it was the same song, second verse. It was almost impossible to get the crops planted. When we finally did, it was much too late and the frost got the soybean crop before it was ready to harvest. That hit doubly hard as we had planted more soybeans than usual, not having been able to plant corn due to the rainfall.

At the end of that year we sat down, studied our expenses for the past year and drew up a budget that cut back in every area except contributions. When Larry presented our cash flow statement and budget to the banker, the banker thought that we wouldn't be able to live on such a tight budget. Larry responded, "We'll live on it!"

For the first few months it was kind of exciting to see how we could stay within the budget and rewarding when we managed to do so. As time wore on, however, so did the strain. I had limited myself to going only to the grocery



store when I went to town, avoiding anything as frivolous as a stop at the local five-and-ten-cent store. (Later I pondered how our small town five-and-ten could survive if everyone's budget was like ours.) We did not eat out, did not go shopping in the city, took in no movies, made no farm or home improvements. I began to hate that budget.

As we visited with friends we learned that they, too, were living on similar shoestrings. It helped much to share with others. I must add here that we did not face danger of losing our farm and the banker never pressured us. We were our own disciplinarians. I'm therefore not writing this as someone who has faced foreclosure, but as someone who can identify with the financial strain that most farmers were and are facing. We also knew that another crop loss might have put us in that other situation very easily.

"(The crisis) has many complex roots. Among the major causes are the decades of agricultural and tax policies that encouraged the development of larger farms, an era of high interest rates linked with current declining land values, the decline in prices of farm commodities, ever-mounting debt loads, and unfavorable weather. The rapidly rising national debt and the increased appropriations for military

expenditures are causes—that few have been ready to acknowledge—directly related to the rural economic crisis."
—Statement of Concern, Kansas MCC Farm Crisis Committee

"We all tend to place value judgments on things, people, situations. Making a profit is good. Foreclosure is bad. But every person and every situation holds within it the potential for good or ill."



The amazing thing has been how God has walked before us even when we didn't recognize what some of our future needs would be. About two months before the frost hit our area, MCC had offered us a part-time job in the northern states in which we were living. We had been speaking in churches on behalf of MCC before this so we felt we would continue to do so and even said that we would take the job without pay. Little did we know that the MCC income, which they insisted we accept, would be what we would be living on in the near future. But God knew.

Juggling our time and travel while farming has not always been easy. We have been most appreciative of grandparents who have cared for our three children numerous times. The job rewards have been much more than monetary. We have established many friendships. We have made good contacts for MCC and the idea of service is always with us. A large number of the MCC constituents in our four-state area are rural people and we feel we can relate to them.

Farming today is different than in the past. When I say this I speak not only about the technological differences. Since the financial stakes are very high, the risk is also greater now than in the past. Years ago when individuals decided to farm, they likely remained farmers for the rest of their lives.

Farming today is uncertain. One or two crop failures can put farmers in such financial straits that they may be forced to leave their farms. Selling and buying at the wrong time a few times may cost you the farm. I have learned that Iowa's farmers didn't "just overspend" nor were they "poor managers" when the farm crisis hit them. The farm crisis can hit anyone at any time.

We have learned many things these past years, but one stands out far beyond all others. That lesson is that even though farming is uncertain, God is certain to be with us. Just as God provided the MCC job for us before we knew we would be needing it, God will be there for us if life on the farm someday comes to an end for us. ■

Edie Tschetter and her husband, Larry, farm near Freeman, S.D. She graduated from Freeman Academy and Junior College and also attended South Dakota State University. She and Larry have served under the General Conference Mennonite Church and MCC in Colombia and Bolivia. They have three children and are members of Hutterthal Mennonite Church in Freeman. Their address is Route 1, Box 135, Freeman, SD 57029.

by Joyce Shutt

In Praise of Thanksgiving

Murphy's Law states, "If anything can possibly go wrong, it will." Murphy must have been a farmer. A farmer with a sense of humor!

If I have learned anything in the past 51 years, it is that things do go wrong. I've also learned that my happiness need not depend on how things go. Happiness is an inner state, the absolutely predictable outcome of being thankful for all things, at all times.

In praise of thanksgiving...not thanksgiving measured by profit or popularity, but thanksgiving as a life stance, the expression of my basic hope and trust in life, thanksgiving that extends beyond our good times to include our pain and failures. For it is in my ability to be grateful — even as my dreams crumble at my feet—that I am lifted above myself, enabled to grow and become the person I long to be.

We all tend to place value judgments on things, people, situations. Making a profit is good. Foreclosure is bad. But every person and every situation holds within it the potential for good or ill. Our mistake lies in allowing ourselves to value something based on limited perspectives and preconceived ideas of right and wrong, shoulds and should-nots.

Most of us believe that death, bankruptcy, divorce, alcoholism and homosexuality are bad. The truth is that such things become evil only when we allow them to destroy our hope and blot out our awareness of beauty and goodness. The very things that seem so terrible when they occur can turn out to be what opens us to God, to the newness and meaning of life. Sometimes we have to hit bottom before we can let go of our need to control, to have things our way, to see that certain situations or outcomes are not valid indicators of our worth and success.

In praise of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving makes sense. When we are thankful, we become active participants in our lives. When we complain, wallow in self-pity, give in to hate and frustration, we allow ourselves to become passive victims of fate.

"Sometimes we have to hit bottom before we can let go of our need to control, to have things our way, to see that certain situations or outcomes are not valid indicators of our worth and success."

"I am learning to praise God for my pain because I now accept my pain as an indication that God wants me to change."



Yet it is difficult to praise God when things go wrong. I know. It's been hard to be thankful in the face of my father's tragic death, my husband's debilitating illness, our sons' drug addictions. It has been difficult... but not impossible.

As I struggle to make sense out of my shattered dreams for being a model farm family, I'm finding that God's gift and promise lies hidden in the very thing that hurts me most. Dad's death I could deal with; he was 74 and had lived a good life. Earl's crippling arthritis has been hard, but he is still able to work and function. But the boys' alcoholism, their addiction! Walking into the courtroom, hearing the judge pronounce sentence, his scathing words toward us, watching our son leave for treatment angry and bitter, spewing words of hatred and rejection...

The pain eases when I can sincerely pray, "Thank you for the boys' addictions. Such pain and suffering seems such a waste, and I am so afraid. Yet even now I can see how this terrible disease is helping us grow closer, to gain new insights, to develop better communication skills."

It is easier to praise God for both the good and the bad when we grasp the truth that pain is inevitable. No matter how good, how faithful, how sincere, capable or righteous we've been, pain is inevitable. Good doesn't always bring its just rewards. Pain is inevitable. But suffering is optional. That's what we need to remember.

Suffering is a result of how we choose to respond to our pain. It isn't our pain that causes us to suffer so acutely, but our tendency to put ourselves down, to view pain or tragedy as punishment, failure, proof of our inherent worthlessness. Faced with personal or financial ruin, we must choose our response. We need not view our experiences as unwarranted punishments. We can seek instead for that which will help us grow, which will help us find new opportunities and happiness.

Christianity's basic theme is death and resurrection. Out of death comes new life, new hope. But that newness cannot be born until we let go of the old: "Lest a seed fall into the ground and dies..." Many of us have made gods of our farms, our good solid Mennonite traditions. I know; we did. We haven't lost our farm—not yet, anyway—but we almost lost our children.

When we can praise God in thankfulness, when we can see good in all of our experiences, we give God permission to reshape and redefine our lives. We give God permission to bring wholeness and healing out of tragedy and failure. Death and resurrection is a constant ongoing process by

which we let go of whatever is limiting us and grasping the infinite...not once, but minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, year by year.

I am learning to praise God for my pain because I now accept my pain as an indication that God wants me to change. God wants me to learn from and use my experience to help others find new minding in the midst of their pain.

By praising God for all that happens—for grumpy neighbors, my alcoholic children, car troubles, Earl's arthritis, my diabetes, Dad's death—I have not become a Pollyanna nor closed my eyes to reality. I am not putting on blinders or denying the power and validity of sin, evil and suffering.

Rather, my thanksgiving is that act which enables me to move beyond the limitations of my feelings, to move beyond the limitations of the moment to that which lies ahead. It helps me hope and wait for a new beginning, knowing that the time will come when our boys will grow emotionally straight and tall, when our school dropouts will leave for college, find a meaningful career.

We suffer when we refuse to change, when we insist on specific outcomes, when we get locked into a defensive stance. Perfection in Christ doesn't mean sinlessness or being mistakeproof. Instead, it is the grateful opening of ourselves to God's refining fires. It is moving beyond being threatened or beaten by life's tragedies, responding to life's challenges with joy and thankfulness.

For those of us caught in the throes of a changing economy and way of life, the pain of losing our farms is excruciating. But we have a choice. We can allow our social upheaval and economic instability to rip us apart, to embitter us, to strip us of our faith. Or we can seek out the good and focus on that. We can learn from and use our painful experience to help others.

In praise of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving...our door to an open future.■

Joyce Shutt pastors **Fairfield (Pa.) Mennonite Church**. Her husband, **Earl**, is a fruit grower. They have four children, two biological and two adopted. Joyce has written numerous articles. Her future plans include writing a book about how they have found ways to make life's difficult experiences, such as their sons' drug addictions and alcoholism, acceptable as gifts and as "a kind of resurrection." Joyce's address is 878 Mt. Carmel Rd., Ortanna, PA 17353.

"One day in December the telephone rang. The bank asked for a meeting at the farm. I had a strong foreboding. It didn't take the banker long to tell us that our projected budget had been rejected at head office and they were calling in their loan... our farm was being foreclosed upon."



by Carol Friesen

Simple Gestures

When Lawrence and I married in November 1973 we not only committed ourselves to each other but also to the Lord. We asked God to guide us in our life together. We both came from farm backgrounds and felt led to continue in our parents' footsteps. Our farm lifestyle—including gardening, canning, fresh meat, clean air, rich soil, open spaces for the children to run and play in—allowed us to be at least partly our own bosses.

Like most farmers, we carried debt. In 1984, Lawrence's brother, David, and his family joined us. We hired an accountant who helped us draw up a five-year plan and showed us how to better manage our credit.

In August 1986 our local bank manager, accompanied by the farms loans manager from Winnipeg, visited us. We shared our concerns regarding our operating costs and projected income. Commodity prices had dropped 20 to 25 percent in each of the past two years, making nonsense of our 1984 budget.

The reason for the commodity price drop was beyond our control. The trade war between the European Common Market and the United States saw the price of wheat go down, down, down. When the Canadian Wheat Board decided to lower the price of wheat again, we knew we could not meet our repayment schedule. Our bank assured us, however, that although our financial situation was not good, they thought we should carry on our farming operations.

One day in December the phone rang. The bank asked for a meeting at the farm. I had a strong foreboding. It didn't take the banker long to tell us that our projected budget had been rejected at the head office, and they were calling in their loan. The following week we were notified that all our outstanding loans on the farm operation and their guarantees were being called. Our farm was being foreclosed. The foreclosure has affected the lives of my

brother-in-law and his family and our own, as well as of our parents, the extended family, our church and our community.

Mennonites have a responsible attitude towards the settling of their debts, and we always intended to settle our loans honorably. The calling in of the bank loan seemed an affront to this ethic, this value which had a high priority in our lives.

So much of what happened at this time was a joint experience, and beyond our control. But then came reaction—and this was individual, and personal. My first reaction was anger at the bank. They had allowed us to extend our credit as long as they saw a return on their money. But when the going got rough, it was their security—not the farm's continuation—they thought about.

Losing the farm went to the heart of our being. Everything we had worked for, the life we held dear, was threatened. We were not yet sure if we were going to salvage any part of our farm. As it turned out, we did keep our farmyard and a quarter of our land holdings, both heavily mortgaged.

Hopelessness followed the anger, a feeling that things would just keep on getting worse, and I could do nothing about it. I was afraid that our very lives were crumbling around us, so attached had I become to the farm. My husband shared these feelings, and together we fought our way through.

I grieved, without always knowing what I was grieving about. Was it the loss of dignity? Mennonites just don't go bankrupt. Was it anger at my husband and myself for getting so deeply in debt? Had all the debt been necessary? I felt guilty about the losses sustained by Lawrence's parents, his brother and family, and the changes in their lifestyle.

Unfortunately, most of us have difficulty helping ourselves or others through this kind of experience. I called upon my faith in God, and the application of this faith made a real difference in the direction our life was to take. I also had friends who stood beside me, who were patient while my grieving ran its course. As a seamstress, I often mend the tears in my children's clothing. Many times lately I have wished feelings could be as easily fixed, as with needle and thread, but they need other treatment.

"Mennonites have a responsible attitude towards the settling of their debts, and we always intended to settle our loans honorably. The calling in of the bank loan seemed an affront to this ethic, this value which had a high priority in our lives."



"People sent cards, letters of encouragement, flowers, notes. They telephoned to say, 'We care.' These simple gestures were priceless. We were strengthened by the many who were willing to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2)."

A wide gap existed between what I felt and what others expected me to feel. I thought they had unrealistic expectations as to when it was time to get on with my life. This lead me to feel afraid, anxious and doubtful. Was I sick? It sometimes felt as if I were. I went through periods of sleeplessness, fear and anger, aggravated by acute anxiety. I lost interest in ordinary activities, was often tired and preoccupied with what had caused our failure. I later learned that one or all of the above emotions are normal in stress-filled times.

Christmas came and went without the usual joy. At quilting sessions and Bible study the topic was farm problems, ending with someone asking me how I was getting along. We shared what was happening to our farms, and had special prayers. The Lord used these sharing times to heal some of my hurts.

When we recovered from the initial shock, we realized we had not been left destitute. We did have some land, even if no money with which to farm it. We did have our house. And we discovered that we had friends, community and a supportive church congregation. But we had to decide how we were going to make our living.

As I began to face the future with courage, I realized what a wealth of memories we were taking with us, and I didn't want anything to spoil that for Lawrence and the girls. Life on the farm was good, and I had to find the strength to transform my hurt and ugly feelings into an act of learning to face the future. Facing our losses was part of regaining my freedom.

During the first weeks, after the news was out, neighbors began asking us out for suppers. It was a relief to be able to talk about our problems, and a joy to experience the love and caring expressed. People sent cards, letters of encouragement, flowers, notes. They telephoned to say, "We care." These simple gestures were priceless. We were strengthened by the many who were willing to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2) This support will be drawn upon and used again and again as we rebuild our career.

Lawrence and I did not avail ourselves of the counseling services available to us, but his brother did. We now feel we might have been wise to also have asked for formal counseling. Losing the farm is a major event in a farmer's

life, perhaps especially so for those such as ourselves who grew up on farms. We have learned that Christians can be survivors, and that there are many resources in our world willing and able to help.■

Carol Friesen and her husband, Lawrence, live on a farm at Box 4, Crystal City, MB R0K 0N0. They are the parents of Rose Marie, 8; Pearl, 5 1/2; and Daniel, 14 months.

by Lois Janzen Preheim

Back Into Focus

I've written several versions of this piece, struggling to find my voice. Finally this morning, lying awake beside my snoring farmer-husband, I face the problem. I cannot easily walk in the shoes of the sisters who are mourning the loss of their farms and their way of life.

For, in the midst of the agricultural crisis, I could and often do fantasize about having a sale, giving it all up, and returning to the city. My problem has been learning to embrace the farm, to accept its claims on my time, to live with a farmer who doesn't always share my urban assumptions of what marriage is all about. To put it simply: while some are dealing with the grief of leaving, I am dealing with the grief of arrival.

Listening to these different but very real griefs, I've concluded that, regardless of which direction one is going, a move between these two very different ways of being is experienced as a massive derailment. With every aspect of one's life affected, it is no wonder we cry out in alarm.

A year after coming to Freeman, I went to a workshop in which one of the leaders shared some insights he has learned from the martial arts. He had us stand on one of gym floor lines and walk on it as if it were a railroad track. Most of us kept falling off. He then instructed us to stand still, find our center of gravity (in women, just below the waist), and then locate a spot at eye level on the opposite wall. He claimed that if we kept in mind our body center and kept looking at the wall, we would not lose our balance—no matter how narrow our track.

"Rural and urban churches seem to be reading from completely different scripts. For much of these four years, it has seemed I am continually muffing my lines."

• Women in the Worldwide Church

• In an unprecedented move by the all-male Synod of the Christ Reformed Church in North America, Laura Smith, 25, an honors graduate from Calvin Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree, was allowed to plead her cause of seeking ministerial candidacy on the synod floor. But after hearing her, the synod bowed to existing regulations barring women from being pastors and refused her request by a 112 to

50 majority. Immediately after the vote, however, she was given a standing ovation with only a few delegates remaining in their seats.

• The Anglican archbishop of Melbourne, Australia says his diocese seeks "by all constitutional means to conduct our first ordination of women as priests" in February 1990. National synods of the Anglican Church of Australia failed to approve such ordinations in 1985 and 1987.

We tried it and it worked. We did not lose our balance. He next instructed us to imagine a spot level with our eyes on the wall behind us. We were to then do a little jump and, while in the air, turn very fast and land on the line. Many of us fell dizzily to the floor. He pointed out that we had fallen because while concentrating on trying to do the jump, the turn, and still land on the line, we had looked at our feet and not at the spot on the wall.

This exercise has been a great gift to me, for I have always felt out of balance after a move. It usually takes me about two years to stop being disorganized and to recover my equilibrium. Although some changes have been easier than others, I have not been clear on what has made the difference. The exercise revealed to me that turns are difficult, but if one stays centered and keep one's eye on the goal, balance can be maintained.

But this exercise also revealed to me why leaving the farm devastates so many. It is precisely the sense of purpose, the sense of direction—the spot on the wall—that disappears. It is extremely difficult to execute a turn while up in the air. Even if one keeps perfect alignment, with head up and eyes wide open, there is still that moment when the wall is not there, not to mention the spot!

So it has been with me. I had a sense of direction in San Francisco. I had goals and purposes, and I knew what God wanted me to do there. Then I met Lyle, and everything changed. Or so it seemed.

After four years, I see that I am still the same reader that I was and that my reflective approach to life is still useful to people who do not read as much as I do and who are more action-oriented than I am. On the other hand, I see that I need this husband who is quite clear when it is a time to read and a time to work, a time to plant and a time to harvest.

I see that my life is better balanced between the indoors and outdoors. The natural world has always refreshed me and communicated God to me, and sometimes San Francisco was too insistently, too stridently man-made.

Here I know myself more clearly to be a daughter of both heaven and earth. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning the laws of both the sky and the soil. At night when the Milky Way is especially clear, I rejoice to be alive. Were I to return to the city, I would miss this nocturnal reminder of eternity.

Gradually I've come to see that the same wonder I felt trying to understand people I am now constantly using

toward the natural world. I am glad to be getting rid of the many fears I had of the physical world, to let myself feel sweaty and tired, to rejoice in the sensory stimulation of rural smells and sounds.

Still, the thing I mourn and which has taken longer to let go of is the exhilarating and exciting role I played in the creation of a congregation. Rural and urban churches seem to be reading from completely different scripts. For much of these four years it has seemed I am continually muffing my lines.

Church here often appears to be mostly a matter of learning to receive the tradition of the fathers in as peaceable a manner as possible. And if one has a sad line from time to time, try not to cry while speaking it. In San Francisco, on the other hand, I was participating in the creation of a tradition consciously trying to integrate faith and feeling. I haven't always known what to do with the veneration of tradition that country people feel so naked without. To me it feels like a costume I don't always need.

Gradually it's been dawning on me that it's this very discomfort that could be useful here if I can learn to communicate my feeling with charitableness and tact. One recent Sunday I realized with some surprise that nearly everyone in the class I teach is in some leadership position in the congregation. Maybe, the thought came, I am exactly where God wants me. It's taken four years, but I think the spot on the wall is coming back into focus!■

Lois Janzen Preheim and her husband, Lyle, live on a farm in the Freeman, S.D. area. Before their marriage Lois had wide experiences both as a teacher and a pastor. She is now doing free-lance writing, while also farming 360 acres of alfalfa, corn and soybeans with Lyle. Her address is Route 2, Box 165, Freeman, SD 57029.



- A monitoring group for the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women met in Mahabalipuram, India in January to review the decade's launching. The decade, endorsed by the World Council of Churches, began after Easter. The group reviewed a proposal for an ecumenical decade fund of approximately U.S. \$75,000 per year for education and networking. Some

representatives, including Aruna Gnanadason of the All India Council of Christian Women, argued that even more important than increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in church structures is to get at underlying theological assumptions which affect women's status.

- A pastoral letter by six U.S. Roman Catholic bishops recommends that the church study admitting women to the office of deacon. The study of admitting women as deacons has not yet been discussed in any church document, however, and the final form of the pastoral will not be completed until at least 1989.

- The 11 diocesan bishops of the (Lutheran) Church of Norway have decided that they will henceforth appoint women priests, though three bishops continue to decline to ordain them. Until now the three dissenters have not signed letters of appointment but now agree that all men and women already ordained will be treated equally.

We encourage and invite letters from readers that speak to the issues raised and the perspectives presented in Report. Although we try to print all letters, some may be shortened or edited to fit available space. All letters must be signed, although writers may request to have their names withheld.

Letters

- I was sincerely disappointed that two sides of the issue were not addressed in the Jan.-Feb. issue of *Women's Concerns Report* (No. 76 Our God Talk: Images, Idols, Metaphors and Masks). As a woman I do not feel the necessity of female imagery when addressing God. I personally find it annoying and offensive when announcements are made about changing the wording of songs; it affects my sense of worship.

I also do not feel that praying to God and addressing him as my father affects my self-image. In prayer, song and Scriptures, I automatically assume that all such references refer to me also.

Recently I was challenged to also speak my views when issues like this are raised. Too often we hear only one side of the story—from those who speak and protest the loudest. In the past I have sat quietly and listened to views because I did not feel like getting into a heated argument over something I view as petty. I think the most important thing is that God loves me and that I must be a witness for him. I am sometimes concerned about the image we portray to non-Christians who may view this as being argumentative.

Thanks for hearing me out. I am not criticizing your work as I feel there are some important issues needing addressed. I recently am hearing some family history of oppression that my grandmother experienced in an abusive marriage.
—Name withheld upon request

Report No. 68 (Women Resisting Injustice) was a highlight for me, giving me a few modern-day heroines. I've forgotten their names but was forcefully impressed with their Christian commitment, involvement and servanthood.

With the current emphasis on storytelling, the larger Mennonite family would do well to have these women's stories expanded and presented in one of the other periodicals. We need justice, reconciliation, servanthood

stories to give us models, heroes and heroines to inspire us for present-day alternatives of kingdom life and action.

On occasion the question of the continued validity of *Report* has been raised. Some women feel they have moved beyond a previous "need" and have other concerns to be considered. I would hope this is true for many! However, there are others who are only now coming to awareness of women's issues. *Report* is bringing them encouragement and hope. Keep publishing! Keep up the good work!
—Linda M. Yoder, Fresno, Ohio

- Oh how I thank you for the issue on wife abuse (No. 74). I tell you it is true. How I can identify. I'm Mennonite and so is my husband. We are both Christian, although I often wonder if my husband isn't more Prussian.

I am TRAPPED. I've tried counseling and he did come for over a year but in the end he analyzed the counselor. He is a brilliant manipulator. And twisted arms or legs don't leave marks. This happens every four to six months. But sarcasm or tuning out occur daily for weeks.

At times after the blow-up he'll be nice for awhile. He'll let me go for a holiday with a girlfriend for a day or two for instance. He'll talk more with me. That makes him look pretty cool and some people can't understand why I'm so depressed.

Recently I thought I'd try a counselor with a highly respected Christian counseling center. At first he was very nice and even agreed with my doctor that I should keep away for a few days. The next day he changed his tune. He told me if I were more attuned to Jesus Christ I wouldn't even feel the physical pain. I never said a thing but I was furious. Maybe he would like to take my place??!

And you know what? Violence breeds violence. I've had a good teacher. I'm sick of being a doormat or perhaps I could say a nice, sweet, long-suffering wife.

Is there a lifeline anywhere? If I left (he refuses to leave), I'd be moneyless, no work skills, worse I'd be ostracized and gossiped about far and near. It is almost impossible for women like me. It's the pits to stay and the pits to go.

Would you be able to forward my letter to the writers of personal stories in the *Report* on wife abuse? Maybe they would write to me. I'm grasping for a straw. A Mennonite support system is no doubt dreaming—but I dream.
—Name withheld upon request

• **Mennonite Women in Ministry**

- **Marty Kolb** was installed as pastor of Taftsville (Vt.) Chapel Mennonite Fellowship on Jan. 10. She succeeds Nelson Kraybill.
- **Ross and Allison Collingwood** have been commissioned as co-pastors of Salem (Ore.) Mennonite Church. They both also teach part-time at Western Mennonite School.

• On Nov. 15, **Lynda L. Kelly** of Welland, Ont., became the first woman to be ordained by the Brethren in Christ Church. Having been involved in pastoral care with her husband and also in hospital chaplaincy for the past 17 years, she recently began a new job as Welland County General Hospital's first full-time chaplain.

About 75 years ago, a Brethren in Christ congregation in

• I have just finished reading the last *Report* on Mennonite Women Artists (No. 75) and have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know yet another group of Mennonite women. I continue to enjoy your diversity and commend you and your colleagues as you address the life of Mennonite women.

—*Janet M. Janzen, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan*

• Please discontinue sending me your newsletter. I do not want to receive it any longer. I get tired of hearing all about feminist issues—especially in a Christian magazine.

—*Lynn Mishler, Topeka, Ind.*

• I have been receiving *Report* since its beginning I believe. I appreciate all the issues you have been covering. I was interested in the one on women international.

I am much involved in helping in the placement of women in positions in our church. I have only been in the present congregation for a few years, but find the attitudes and beliefs of some members difficult to even believe.

I get angry at times and then work through to more understanding. People who believe and live according to Ephesians 5:23 I cannot understand!

Keep up your good paper and know that many of us are reading you.

—*Name withheld upon request*

Oklahoma ordained a woman but the larger church refused to acknowledge the validity of that action. Participants in Kelly's ordination service included the denomination's general secretary and the president of Emmanuel Bible College, who noted that Kelly was the first woman graduate of his school to be ordained.

• **Marvin and Donnita Payne Hostetler** were both ordained as pastors of First Mennonite Church of Lincoln, Neb., last October.

• **Don and Joyce Wyse** are succeeding **Ruth Buxman** as pastors of the First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, Calif.

• Kim Miller received the third Youth Memorial Fund award of the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec. A student in the University of Waterloo's Independent Studies program, Miller suffered severe orthopedic injuries when hit by a drunk driver in 1983. She is writing a thesis on coping with sudden disabilities and is also coordinating the Peer Resources Enrichment Program at the Independent Living Center in Kitchener.

• Lorna Schwartzenruber of Toronto, Ontario is the current interim dean of students at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo. She is a 1983 graduate of the college.

• Evelyn Klassen coordinates a support program for wives of prisoners, called M2/W2, in Alberta. Klassen herself grew up in a low-income section of Calgary, from a large family that had its share of poverty and misery. She later attended the Columbia Bible Institute and the University of Calgary.

• Betty L. Dyck of Winnipeg, Man., has written a book due for spring release by the Canadian Plains Research Centre of the University of Regina. It is *Running to Beat Hell*, a biography of a woman athlete, United Church minister and humanitarian.

• The Louisiana Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers presented MCC worker Judith Menadue with its prestigious president's award for 1987. An attorney, Menadue directs the Capital Defense Project in New Orleans. The project recruits lawyers to represent death row prisoners during the appeals process.

• Mary Herr served as co-leader of an April spirituality retreat sponsored by the Lancaster (Pa.) Conference. Mary and her husband, Gene, serve in a retreat ministry at the Hermitage, a facility they founded in Michigan.

• Donella Clemens was elected president of the board of trustees of Christopher Dock Mennonite High School in Lansdale, Pa. She has been a member of the board since 1981 and vice president since 1984. She also serves as chairperson of the Franconia Conference's Nurture Commission and represents the conference on the Mennonite Church General Board.

• Wanda Aquino is completing a three-month photography internship in the Information Services department at MCC Akron. The work is required for a masters degree in communications from CBN University of Virginia Beach, Va. Aquino was the first woman to graduate from the Hispanic Ministries program at Goshen College.

News

and Verbs

- Linda Oyer is dean and New Testament instructor at the European Bible Institute in Paris, France. A Mennonite Board of Missions worker, Oyer also leads weekend Bible seminars in Mennonite congregations and is currently working on a doctorate at the Catholic Institute in Paris.
- Synapses director, Dorothy Friesen of Chicago, and Synapses consulting member, Cheryl Payer, are listed as resource people in the newly published *Women's Foreign Policy Directory*. The resource lists hundreds of women making an impact on foreign affairs by executing policy, writing, teaching and lecturing. For more information about the directory contact Women's Foreign Policy Council, 1133 Broadway, New York, NY 10010.

- **Clara Major**, a Mennonite Ojibway Indian from Ontario, recently joined a church planting team in Browning, Mont., sponsored by the Northwest Mennonite Conference and the Mennonite Board of Missions.
- **Harold and Mary Grace Shenk** were installed as pastoral couple at Stahl Mennonite Church in Johnstown, Pa., recently. The couple, who lived and served in Atlanta, Ga., for the past 26 years, are currently in full-time church ministries studies at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Va. They will assume full-time leadership at Stahl Mennonite Church following their May graduation.
- **Anita Nussbaum Greiser** has succeeded Frances Jackson as coordinator of the Philadelphia Mennonite Council. Greiser and her husband, David, have been church planters in Philadelphia for the past three years.
- **Beulah Stauffer Hostetler** has authored *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements*, being published by Herald Press. Hostetler is a sociology professor and associate director of the Center for the Study of Anabaptist and Pietist Groups at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College.
- **Barbara Nickel**, a senior music major at Goshen (Ind.) College, has written *Opal's Sun: Stories and Essays from Home*. The book was published by the college's Pinchpenny Press.
- **Susan Ebersole** of New York was one of two featured artists at Art 87 held last December at The People's Place in Intercourse, Pa. Her message to the 100 visual artists and guests in attendance was that art's function is to express what it means to be human and to call forth a response.
- **Rebeca Jimenez Yoder** has been appointed immigration consultant for the Council of Anabaptists in Los Angeles. Originally from Costa Rica, Jimenez Yoder will help undocumented immigrants gain legal status in the United States and will coordinate classes for them.
- **Elizabeth Yoder** of Elkhart, Ind., will administer a project to provide resources and leadership training in the area of alcohol use and abuse. Yoder, a free-lance editor and writer, is one of two part-time staff persons hired to work on the project by the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church. The other is Willard S Krabill of Goshen, a physician, writer and college professor.
- **Joanne Lehman**, a free-lance writer in Kidron, Ohio, has been appointed editor of *Ohio Evangel*, the magazine of the Ohio Mennonite Conference.
- **Cornelia Lehn** has written *The Sun and The Wind*, an Aesop fable retold as a children's peace story. Faith and Life Press is the publisher.
- Paintings by **Elaine Jennings Buerge**, including colorfully patterned images with both figurative and abstract themes, were exhibited at Hesston (Kan.) College in February. A Goshen, Ind., native, Buerge did her undergraduate work at Goshen College and recently completed graduate studies at Pittsburg (Kan.) State University.
- **John P. Lehman and Barbara Moyer Lehman** were installed as co-pastors at Orrville (Ohio) Mennonite Church in January.
- **Barbara Unruh** was licensed for ministry last December at Bethel College Church, North Newton, Kan.
- **Martha Smith Good**, former pastor of the Stirling Avenue and Guelph Mennonite congregations in Ontario, will become campus minister at Goshen (Ind.) College in September. She succeeds Nancy Lapp and Keith Graber-Miller. She is currently completing her Doctor of Ministry degree at the Toronto School of Theology.
- **Esther Epp-Tiessen**'s meditation on images of God, printed in the Nov. 23, 1987 issue of *Mennonite Reporter*, spawned considerable reader reaction. In the Jan. 18 *Mennonite Reporter*, for example, Richard Neufeld of Watrous, Saskatchewan wrote, "It would be much better to have a church disintegrate... (rather than disobey) the word of God as stated in I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:11-15."

On the other hand, Elizabeth Enns of Winnipeg wrote in the Feb. 1 issue, "We keep forgetting that Jesus tells his disciples to be servants as he served them. Nowhere are they encouraged to be authority figures (Mark 10:42-45). If we could remember his servanthood that all believers are to emulate, we might be able to stop worrying about the sex of the servant and become a real community of believers." Epp-Tiessen's article also appeared in the Jan.-Feb. 1988 issue of *Women's Concerns Report*.

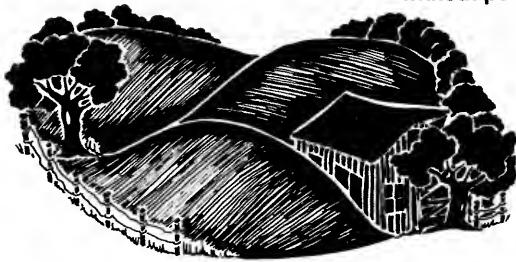
- Bread for the World's 1988 Offering of Letters will support Women in Development programs funded by U.S. foreign aid. To order the 1988 Offering of Letters Kit, send \$5 to BFW, 802 Rhode Island Ave. N.E., Washington, DC 20018. Last year's Offerings of Letters supported the WIC supplemental food program for women, infants and children, which resulted in a \$73 million above-inflation increase in WIC allocations.
- More than 40 women from 15 Pacific countries met late last year in Tonga to discuss "Caring for God's Creation." The Pacific consultation on justice, peace and the integrity of creation was organized by agencies of the YWCA, the World Council of Churches and the Tonga National Council of Churches. The consultation focused on a "nuclear-free and independent Pacific," environment, women in politics and family life.
- A survey of attitudes of Ontario Mennonite churchgoers discovered a surprising level of support for women's active role in ministry. The study, commissioned by *Mennonite Reporter*, "reveals a relatively sophisticated constituency that is aware of the complexity of the issue, shuns simple and/or radical solutions and generally favors extensive involvement of women in ministry," according to researcher Henry J. Regehr.

While respondents acknowledged specific New Testament injunctions against women in positions of authority, they questioned the normativity of these teachings. "Collectively the respondents do not view cultural values as authoritative for the church, either in New Testament times or now," Regehr wrote in the Jan. 4, 1988 issue of *Mennonite Reporter*.

- MCC is looking for a half-time women's concerns coordinator, based in Akron, to replace Emily Will. Applications are being accepted through May 16. Contact Jerry Shank, Personnel Dept., MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501 for details or to express interest.

"The Lord said in his heart, 'As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.'" —Genesis 8:22

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- Alice Price will succeed Dave Brubaker as associate director for Mennonite Conciliation Services, based in the MCC Akron offices, beginning in May. Presently an attorney and mediator in La Jara, Colo., Price has written on women's legal rights. She formerly served on the Pennsylvania Commission for Women.
- Louise "Lou" Murray, currently a graduate student at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, will become MCC's associate secretary for Africa this spring. She will work from the Akron office. Former MCC Somalia country representative, Murray coordinated the Horn of Africa project of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel since early 1986.
- Sue Clemmer Steiner, associate pastor of St. Jacobs Mennonite Church in Ontario, was a keynote speaker at a March conference on the theme, "Beyond Pluralism: What Mennonites Believe Today." It was held at the Laurelville Mennonite Church Center in Mt. Pleasant, Pa. Clemmer Steiner's topic was "Why are we asking belief questions?"
- Esther Braun-Sommer of Langnau, Switzerland, will be the Swiss Mennonite Conference's new executive secretary beginning this spring.
- Philhaven Hospital in Mt. Gretna, Pa. offered two day-long women's interest seminars in April. "On Being Friends: From Loneliness to Linking" was taught by Naomi Lederach, Carole Seck, Ruth Lesher and Mim Book. Ruth Senter of Carol Stream, Ill., served as resource person for "Beyond Safe Places and Easy Answers: Trusting God through Life's Risks".
- Goshen College has a temporary, one-year opening in the Computer and Information Science Department for the 1988-89 year. Minimum qualifications include a master's degree in computer science. For details contact Willard Martin, Academic Dean, Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526. The college is also seeking a resident hall director, beginning fall 1988. Inquire of Larry Rupp, Acting Dean of Student Development.
- Laura Loewen and Esther Epp-Tiessen were elected to the MCC Canada Executive Committee in January. Loewen is completing studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Ind. She served as MCC Zambia country representative from 1981 to 1985. Esther Epp-Tiessen of Kitchener, Ont., served as co-country representative with her husband, Dan, of the MCC Philippine program from 1982 to 1986.

REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Emily Will, Editor, MCC, Box M, Akron, PA 17501.

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**Mennonite
Central
Committee**

21 South 12th Street
Box M
Akron, PA
17501

21 S. 12th St., Box M

PAID

Akron, PA 17501